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Thank you for considering the following comments on the 4th Draft proposal.

I worked in the campaign against the Peripheral Canal referendum in 1982. I sat in a dingy political office in Pasadena churning out press releases and staging media events to encourage people in Southern California to vote “no.” We won; the canal lost—by a roughly 62% to 38% margin.

For me, someone who has been following all the water-grabbing action for the past 26 years since that campaign, the most interesting thing about this latest move to steal Northern California water is that the Peripheral Canal has now become a “conveyance” system or else a “dual conveyance” system. This is understandable because the word “conveyance” sounds less threatening than a Peripheral Canal—which immediately conjures up the image of a monstrous cement ditch. Whatever, “conveyance” still equates to a Peripheral in Draft #4 because the draft does not specifically rule out a Peripheral Canal.

What’s even more interesting to me is that none of the basic issues of 1982 has changed:

1. It’s still a water grab by the Los Angeles Metropolitan Water District (MWD).
2. The total cost (now around \$30-billion) is still prohibitive, especially when California is about \$15-billion in debt.
3. Even though Southern California wants more water, a Peripheral Canal still can’t *make* more water. It can only divert more Sacramento River water south.
4. The gigantic sucking action of the pumps in the Clifton Court Forebay below Stockton is still killing fish and causing reverse flows in the delta.

This 4th Draft joins a flood of other water industry propaganda that is trying to convince us that we can save the Delta, save the fish, repair the levees, protect the precious ecosystem, create a water system for the future that will meet everyone’s needs while preserving the environment and still send more Sacramento River water south—*as if that were really possible!*

We all know why Southern California wants the water. In 2003, to solve the Colorado River water debate, the Federal Government declared that the MWD had 15 years to find other sources. Since then the MWD has asked its member districts to conserve water and reclaim wastewater, but it has never stopped coveting a Peripheral Canal because that’s the only option that can fulfill all its needs for now and the foreseeable future.

Now comes this Delta Vision Blue Ribbon Task Force with the “news” that the Delta is “in crisis” and the “ecosystem is not sustainable over the long term.” It’s 12 recommendations “cannot be decided by themselves,” i.e.,

individually. The first recommendation proclaims the “Delta ecosystem and a reliable water supply for California are the primary, co-equal goals for sustainable management of the Delta.” No. 8 states, “New facilities for conveyance and storage, and better linkage between the two, are needed to better manage California’s water resources, the estuary and exports.”

In baseball, you can’t tell the players without a program and in California water politics you can’t understand the code words without a translation guide, so here it is:

1. The “co-equal” goals of “restoring the Delta ecosystem” and providing “a reliable water supply” is the core of the 4th Draft proposal. A thorough analysis shows this to be unrealistic because the two goals are actually *contradictory*. In no manner can you send more Sacramento River water south—at any time—and not harm the Delta.
2. “In Crisis” means the water agencies are trying to pin the blame for the Delta’s deterioration on Mother Nature when it’s their own mismanagement of the Delta that’s at fault. Since the year 2000 the DWR has been allowing the MWD to increase its allotment yearly and this is what has been killing more fish and causing more levees to deteriorate.
3. “Ecosystem not sustainable over the long term” means it’s going to be an on-going expense—a bottomless money pit.
4. “Better linkage” means even more canals will be built, probably cross-state canals.
5. “Cannot be decided by themselves” means there will be no piecemeal fixes—no matter how necessary. We’ll have to buy the whole expensive package.
6. “Conveyance” means a Peripheral Canal or some kind of big canal with but one real objective: to move more Northern California water south.

It is clear that Delta Vision’s “co-equal goals” are simply a propaganda device designed to make people think that their approval of such a plan will put them on the side of saving the environment. Politicos and advertising people call it “positioning.” You simply want to claim the high ground of “saving the Delta” in order to position Peripheral Canal opponents as non-caring, selfish isolationists who couldn’t care less for their fellow human beings—when the reverse is more accurate.

What the Blue Ribbon panel is really doing is putting the Peripheral Canal back on the state’s water agenda under a different name and with a different justification in order to fool people. One must ask “why?” Why, after being defeated two-to-one in 1982 are both the Republican Governor and the Democrat Senator putting their prestige on the line in such a divisive issue? Do they each harbor a hidden martyr complex? Or has something occurred that makes the selling of the Peripheral Canal more palatable?

For one thing there is a whole new generation-and-a-half of voters out there now who have never heard of the 1982 Peripheral Canal issues and therefore have no opinion on the issue. Evidently the people running things now also feel the word “conveyance” is less threatening to new voters and might even fool some old voters. In all likelihood there is a whole new rationale ready to be rolled out in a massive statewide TV campaign that is built around saving the Delta while de-emphasizing the conveyance system.

Obviously this “Save The Delta” approach is intended to fool tree-huggers, water lovers, environmentalists and young liberals who don’t read past the headlines. And by putting a “green” face on the canal plan, it will give Northern California legislators (and voters) an emotional rationale to support it. I look for the new campaign to be couched in terms of a larger, more caring water plan which now calls for a “balanced” approach (who can be against “balance?”) to fixing the Delta’s woes.

Important questions must be asked because if this new propaganda balloon ever gets off the ground people might think this fairy tale is real. Here are some basic truths:

1) First, why has the Delta deteriorated so much in the first place? How did it get the way it is now? Mindy McIntyre, the Planning and Conservation League's water program manager writes that the Delta's current crisis occurred because water project operators chose "to maximize Delta pumping and increase exports by 1-million to 2-million acre feet a year...since 2000. This increase in pumping occurred despite the availability of water supply alternatives and the collapsing fish populations."

So what we have here is a situation where the MWD was allowed by the Department of Water Resources to incrementally increase its allotment of Sacramento River water almost at will. In other words, they've already been stealing more Northern California water for a decade and getting away with it and now they want to institutionalize their theft!

Evidently, the courts agree. A federal judge recently put the water agencies on notice that by increasing pumping allotments for the MWD, they are violating sections of the Endangered Species Act. He is expected to order limits on water deliveries from the Delta this fall.

2) Any more water diverted from the Sacramento River will interfere with the natural "flushing" action that keeps the salt water carried in by bay tides out of the Delta. Without this flushing action, silt will eventually build up and completely cut off the bay area from the Delta and doom all the fisheries and farmers who are dependent upon fresh water. Where will the salmon then go to spawn? Pinole?

3) A new, more fanciful study that pointedly stresses the need for a Peripheral Canal has been produced by a non-profit research group known as the Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC), which makes UC Davis its home. This body is funded, however, by none other than Stephen D. Bechtel, jr., owner of the Bechtel Corp. which, not so incidentally, builds big things like Peripheral Canals. The Bechtel Corporation is also a proponent of, and is aggressively pushing, privatized (privately-owned) water systems.

5) Recently, the DWR announced the creation of a "Drought Water Bank"—a misnomer if there ever was one. What they mean is they will allow Northern California farmers who can save water through conservation, idling crops or using groundwater instead of surface water, to sell their water to the Southland. The problem is, the plan still involves pumping more Northern California water south—further destroying the Delta ecosystem and eroding the levees.

6) Finally, any plan which endeavors to take water from where it is *needed* and send it to where it is *scarce* is not sound economic or environmental reasoning and violates every tenet of wise water usage.

I realize the stakes are high in this new California Water War and the tactics are not all that removed from when it all began back in 1913 when William Mulholland, the first superintendent of the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, cast a greedy eye northward to the Owens Valley. He was so intent on stealing Owens Lake water that the acquisition of water rights was done on the sly by Los Angeles insiders in order to cover up the theft.

Today, the MWD and the Westlands Water District are busy buying up land around the Sacramento River at the Yolo Bypass, just above Sacramento. Officials of the two water districts say it is to protect their access to water from the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta. They are also seeking to partnership with other landowners in the area. Although they are not buying on the sly, it is definitely 1913 water war *déjà vu*.

To me, a paraphrase of a statement by the 19th Century economist and philosopher Henry George vividly characterizes the south's new try at grabbing more Northern California water: "If they robbed us yesterday, does that now give them a vested right to keep on robbing us?"

Certainly the water agencies think so; but the people of California may have other ideas.

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